ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.	DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW
ED001555	N.A.	N.A.	

4. AUTHOR(S):
Riessman, Frank and Specht, Harry

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
Some Notes on a Model for an Integrated Social Work Approach to Social Problems

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
N.A.

7. EDITOR(S):
N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
Mobilization For Youth, Inc.
ORG.
271 E. Fourth Street
CITY, STATE
New York, N.Y.
TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
Mobilization For Youth, Inc.
271 E. Fourth St., New York, N.Y.

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
N.A.	N.A.	7/63	13

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED YES ☐ NO ☒

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED YES ☐ NO ☐

TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR
report

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

social agencies		Mobilization for Youth	
social relationships		social levels	
community organization/planning		social workers	

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Social agencies should be organized, not to offer specific services, but rather to deal with social problems and related areas. Social work has tended to develop technicians with specialized points of view. Social problems can occur at the social levels of the individual, the group, the organization, or the institution. Each level involves a different group of social workers and a different set of methods. To determine the best solution for a social problem, the social worker must first locate the level of the problem. It is also necessary that professional social workers, most of whom are specialists in one particular method, have a theoretical frame-work which enables them to link their practice to broader social concerns. The social worker should view a client as a person with a problem which exists not in the client alone, but in a total social system.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OF PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

000445

ED0015555

HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
CENTER FOR RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02138

MOBILIZATION FOR YOUTH, Inc.

Some Notes on a Model for an Integrated Social Work Approach to Social Problems

by Harry Specht and Frank Riessman
July, 1963.

Much confusion existsregarding the selection of the appropriate social work method to be employed when confronting a particular problem. We see evidence of this in the numerous discussions currently taking place regarding whether social workers should be "generalists" or "specialists",[1] and discussions which attempt to weigh the value of one method or approach against another. Currently the field is becoming more conscious of the need for social action using group work and community organization methods,and the one-to-one approach using case work methods is in the dog house.

The development over the last few years of broadly based programs such as Mobilization for Youth in New York City has, if anything, intensified the need for clarifying the means by which the various social work methods are put to use in an integrated attack on social problems. That is, the uselessness and confusion of both a "methods" approach and a "settings" or a "fields of practice" approach to social work practice can be seen most clearly when the profession is given sanction by the community to confront a social problem with all available methods.

A very strong and forthright statement of the need for increased use of methods other than those of long term intensive case work is contained in a paper by F. P. Purcell, "The Brief Contact".[2] Purcell indicates that too many of the

REPRINTED BY PERMISSION
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN PRINTED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

formulations which are used in case work practice direct our attention "to constitutional variables over which we have little or no control". These formulations do not take sufficient account of two major factors which, increasingly, have been demonstrated to be significantly related to psychiatric pathology and long-term dependency --- "powerlessness, or alienation, and [lack of] social knowledge or social learning".[3] Purcell discusses the need for a new definition of social work method "which would focus on the culture of poverty, its nature and consequences for the person".[4] He concludes his paper with the comment that the practice of social work which he supports "cuts across the spectrum of social work methodology".[5] While we strongly support Purcell in regard to the pertinent questions he raises about the organization of services, we feel that his paper stops short of providing social workers with a guiding model to enable them to deal with the factors on which the decisions regarding the selection of methods must be based. "Short term, brief contacts" are advocated, but the specific methods to be used in these contacts are unspecified, though it is suggested that an increased use of group methods is desirable. Purcell begins to approach the problem with which this paper deals when he suggests that agencies must be organized not to offer a specific service but rather to deal with a social problem.

A good deal of Purcell's thinking is based on the work of William Schwartz who has contributed significantly to the clarification of this problem by defining a social work method.[6] Schwartz notes that the function of a social agency is determined by the social problem with which it deals rather than by the relational systems (e.g., individual, group) which are used to translate the function into service. Schwartz bases his development of a social work method on the notion

that social work is practiced in various social systems (e.g., with an individual or in a group) and that these systems merely determine the "activities" of the worker. The "method" is a generic method. It is our intention in this paper to discuss the ways in which social problems are located in these various social systems and the relationship between these social systems. Since we believe, as does Schwartz, that practice of a generic social work method and the development of a generalist orientation does not preclude the development of specializations, for the purposes of this paper we will continue to use the term "method" to refer to the specialized activities of the worker within different relational systems.

Certainly, part of the difficulty in selecting methods to use in dealing with social problems arises from the failure to recognize that most social problems with which social agencies deal exist within a complex system of social relationships and can be defined at various levels within that system. Consequently, different types of intervention can be proposed for different levels. That is, the question of which method to use in dealing with the social problem requires a framework that takes account of the following factors:

1. the "location" of the problem, which describes the individual, groups, organizations, and institutions which constitute the social system within which the problem exists;

2. the objectives of the agency which determine at which level the agency would like to attempt to intervene in the social problem; and

3. the total range of social work methods required to intervene at these different levels.

The simple model which we will suggest provides, we believe, a means of defining almost any problem in terms of its ramifications at various levels of the social system. The social system includes the following:

the individual level;

the primary group level;

the voluntary association level;

the formal organization level; and finally,

the institutional level.

Viewed simply, we might describe these levels with five concentric circles (see figure A) with the individual level represented by the innermost circle and the remaining circles representing primary groups, voluntary associations, organizations, and institutions.

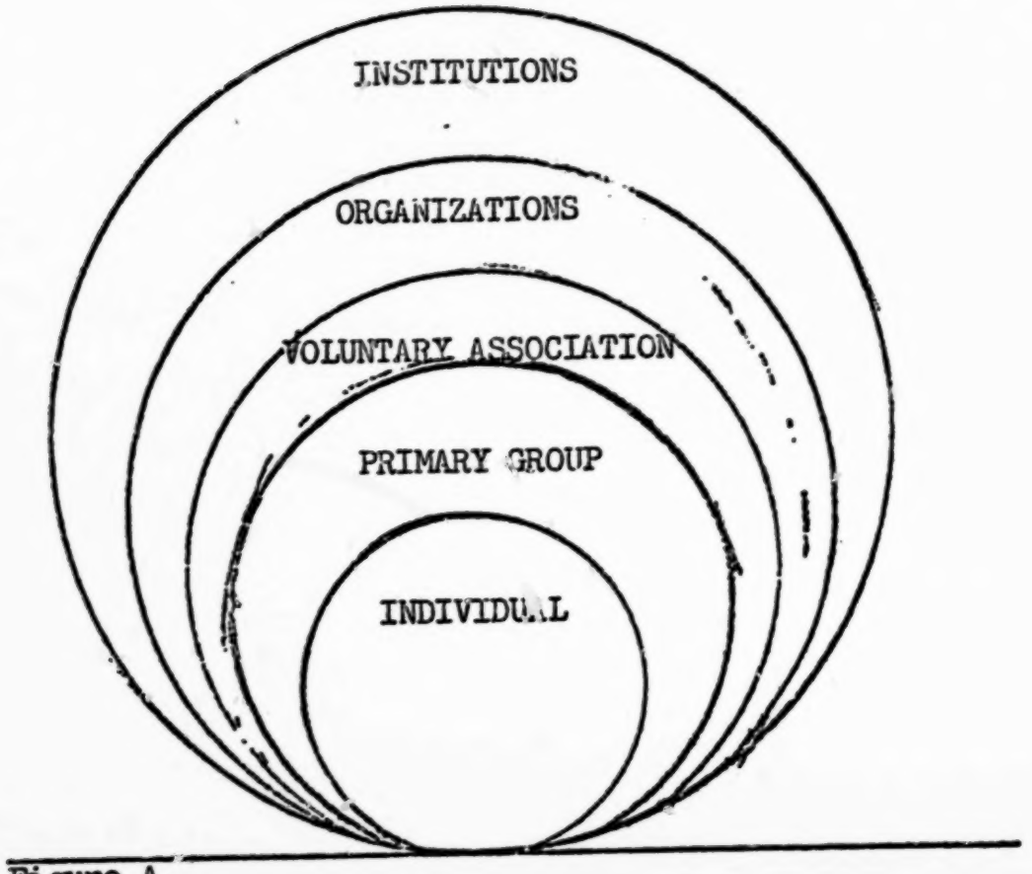

Figure A.

The foremost concern of social work is with "social functioning" which can be simply defined as the relationships between individuals and society. Society meets the social needs of individuals through institutions (e.g., employment, housing, education). Mediating between the individual and the institution are the progressively more complicated social structures: the primary group (e.g., friends, family, the gang); voluntary associations (i.e., a highly articulated series of primary groups); and organizations (i.e., collectivities which have some degree of specialization and formalization of tasks and functions). Institutions are composed of all of these structures and include as well the governmental and legislative laws, procedures, and agencies which regulate these structures.

One further note before we examine the ways in which this framework may be used to look at a social problem. The concentric circles representing the various structures are, in reality, overlapping and often fused. Thinking of various ideal-types of people it would be recognized that at one extreme there are some individuals who have immediate access to the institutional structure in fulfilling their social needs while at the other extreme are individuals who are completely isolated. An example of the first extreme ideal type would be an individual who can fulfill a social need such as finding a job or a home without having to use any of the other mediating structures (although, of course, such individuals do use the other mediating structures to fulfill other needs). The other extreme ideal-type of individual, the isolated person, may not be able to utilize any of the other mediating structures to fulfill a particular social need. In between these extreme ideal types, there are individuals who have varying degrees of access to, and ability to use, the other mediating structures to fulfill their social needs.

In order to make the analysis more meaningful, let us take a sample problem such as housing. Let us assume that the client, Mrs. X, is concerned about the seriously bad physical condition of her apartment. Let us say that the problem is brought to the attention of the agency by Mrs. X who asks for help, or by a complaining neighbor or a housing manager. At the individual level, the problem might well have something to do with Mrs. X's ability to make use of either personal or other resources which are available to her because she is a poor housekeeper or because she is disorganized or emotionally depressed. Case work skills or the assistance of a homemaker working with her may be required to enable her

to use her resources more adequately. Further analysis quickly reveals however that the problem may be located at a number of other levels: 1) the primary group level-housing violations such as rats or lack of heat are a problem to the other tenants in the building and presumably group work approaches could be utilized to bring the tenants together to discuss the matter and to take joint action to correct the condition; 2) the voluntary association level -- other buildings on the block or other holdings of the same landlord could be involved because of their common dimension. The aim might be to build a tenant's council and group work and community organization methods might be useful in this operation; 3) the formal organization level -- here associations or integrations of various housing clinics might be contemplated in order to deal more effectively with the broad social problems involved such as the role of the public agencies and the legal system of code enforcement. More elaborate social action and administrative and planning skills would now be necessary. Organizations such as IENA and the Metropolitan Council on Housing are illustrative. 4) the institutional level -- concern for necessary housing legislation, or attempting to bring about change in the policies of the large housing agencies are possibilities at this level. Planning techniques are most relevant here but social action and administrative methods are also useful.

Figure B provides schematic representation of the different levels within the total social system and the various intervention procedures possible at

each level.

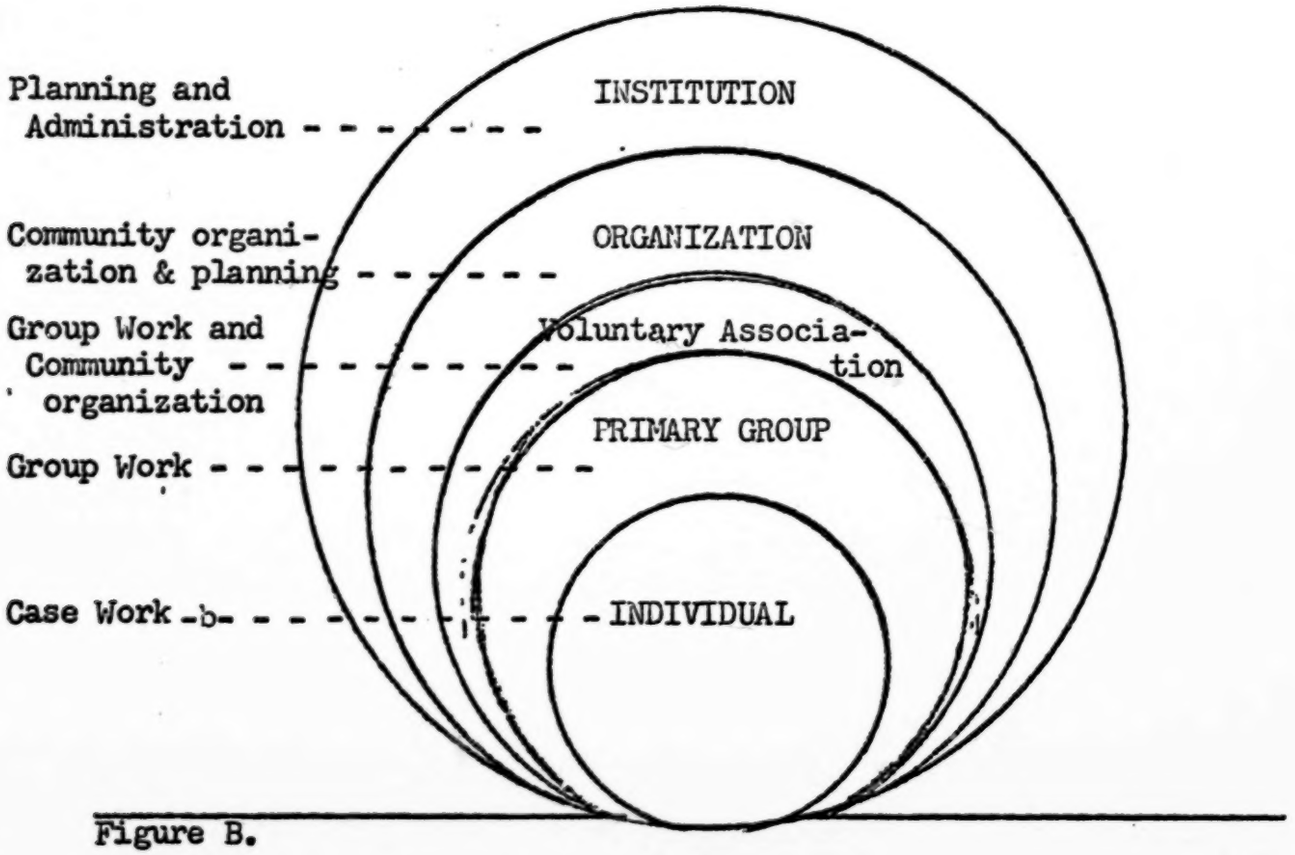

Figure B.

In figure B we suggest that case work skills are best suited to working with problems which exist at the individual level, group work skills at the primary group level, group work and community organization skills at the voluntary association level, community organization and social planning skills at the organizational level and administrative and planning skills at the institutional level. Obviously, a social problem exists at all levels within the social system simultaneously. Mrs. X, conceivably, could receive some case work help enabling her to make better use of her personal resources and at the same time she could become involved with a group of fellow tenants, a group which is working with an organization of

tenant groups which is planning a program of social action on the very highest institutional level. This oversimplified illustration merely suggests the questions to be asked in selecting level of intervention. Obviously, the task is extremely complicated since the selection of method is not merely dependent upon the degree of emotional problem. The factors of social class, cultural background, and the agency's objectives and goals are some of the other variables which determine the selection of level of intervention. For example, there is ample evidence that primary group relations are of greater importance among lower-income individuals,[7] while higher-income people participate in voluntary associations to a much greater degree.[8]

Thus, even if Mrs. X's problem is related to the way in which she uses her personal resources, the factors of social class, ethnicity, religion and agency objectives and goals might well mean that intervention should be attempted at other than an individual level. On the other hand, though a problem may appear to be located at a high organizational level -- for example that the code enforcement laws are poorly enforced -- social class and other factors may demand a large investment in work on a one-to-one or primary group level before the client, the agency, and the community are prepared to undertake institutional change.

The basic point we are making is that the first major decision which social workers must make in dealing with social problems is at what level intervention is to take place. The question of whether it is a caseworker, a group worker, or a community organizer who does the intervening at the particular point in the system which is selected as target is, it seems to us, a

problem which can be dealt with only after the appropriate level of intervention has been selected. All social workers must, first of all, be prepared to evaluate the social problem with which they are dealing in this way. That is, to locate it. Whether it is the caseworker who meets with the tenant group, or a group worker who accompanies the gang members to the job placement center, or a community organizer who runs the housing clinic is an administrative decision which must be based on a knowledge of the agency's resources (e.g., how much group skill the case worker has, or how necessary a massive organization of tenants would be for creating institutional change) as well as on the agency's objectives.

Before we turn to the question of agency objectives, we would suggest that it cannot be realistically expected that any one social worker is capable of dealing with the entire range of the social system and the methods of work utilized at each level. That is, the caseworker could not reasonably be expected to carry out all of the tasks suggested in regard to the various levels and methods of work by which we said Mrs. X's problem might be tackled. The generalist approach, it seems to us, is a point of view rather than a method of work. Indeed, there is no reason why a social worker with a generalist point of view cannot specialize in a method of work. It is difficult to imagine a social work profession in which "everybody does everything" as being anything more than an unselective hodge podge.

The generalist orientation is necessary to the field of social work at this time. A particular danger inherent in the ever-increasing degree of specialization in the field of social work is pointed out in Alvin Shorr's

paper, "The Retreat to the Technician".[9] Shorr notes that while the increased technical proficiency of our profession has positive aspects, there is a growing concern about "how many technicians we have" and "how ... few interest themselves in or support social reform".

Shorr suggests that the problem is, in part, attributable to the very nature of social work. He says:

> Social work is institutional in nature, that is, highly structured in organization, so that the problem of escaping technicianship ... is ... difficult.[10]

Professional investments in specialized methods of work and orientations to social problems can mitigate against selecting appropriate points of intervention. Purcell points out, correctly, that in the design of the Mobilization For Youth program "The structure of the profession appears to have, at least in part, defined the nature and scope of the problem."[11] More often than not, the social work practitioner selects the clients who are suited to make use of his methods and skills rather than selecting the skills and methods suited to his client's needs. While criticism of this kind has been leveled most often at case workers, we believe that this occurs only because case work is at this time the most available and the most used method. The kind of "professional myopia" we are discussing, to borrow a term from Eveline Burns, is no doubt a professional disease to which all social workers are vulnerable. That is, the group worker and community organizer can be as narrow and limited in their perception of a social problem though we tend to be less concerned about it in these instances because there is generally less group work and community organization practiced in the field.

To close we would like to comment briefly on the place of agency objectives in this frame-work. While our model is potentially useful in terms of diagnosis of a problem within the system it does not, in and of itself, indicate which methods are most salient and should therefore be employed. Nor does it provide any inherent system of priorities for intervention to be followed. What is required in order for action to take place on the basis of the diagnosis is an explication of goals and objectives. Hence, if the agency's goal is the development of power and the reduction of political alienation among its lower-income clientele, much less attention will be given to individually oriented case work methodology, at least insofar as it is currently practiced. However, if the goal of the agency is to reduce the incidence of recidivism among ex-mental patients, case work methods might prove to be most useful although the framework we have presented would draw the social worker's attention to the parts of the social problem of the ex-mental patient which may be located at other social levels. Selection of the level of social work intervention by use of this framework might well mean that some higher level proves to be a more viable point at which to intervene in this particular social problem.

If, as Alvin Shorr suggests, the cult of the technician is composed of "those professionals who ... feel alienated from the broad purposes of social work",[12] it is necessary that social work professionals, most of whom are specialists in one method or another, have a theoretical frame-work which enables them to link their practice to broader social work concerns. The social work practitioner will be increasingly better able to diagnose and

prescribe for his client as his orientation allows him to view his client as a social person with a problem that exists, not in the client alone, but in a total social system.

---

1. For example see: "Social Work Executive: Generalist or Specialist?", John J. Ryan, Social Work, Vol. 8, #2, 4/63; and "The Brief Contact" by F. P. Purcell, Mobilization For Youth, New York City, 3/63 (mimeographed).
2. F. P. Purcell, op. cit.
3. ibid, P. 5.
4. ibid, P. 14.
5. ibid, P. 19.
6. William Schwartz, "The Social Worker In The Group", in New Perspectives On Services To Groups: Theory, Organization, Practice. NASW, New York, 1961.
7. Morris Axelrod, "Urban Structure and Social Participation", in Cities And Society, ed. Paul K. Hatt and Albert J. Reiss, Jr., Glencoe, Ill. Free Press, 1957.
8. William G. Mather, "Income And Social Participation", American Sociological Review, Vol. 1, #3, 6/41.
9. Alvin Schorr, Social Work, Vol. 4, #1, 1/59.
10. ibid, P. 32.
11. F. P. Purcell, op. cit., P. 4.
12. Alvin Schorr, op. cit. P. 29.